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ABSTRACT

Observations were made while psychologically evaluating Korean school children in the greater Chicago area. The observations were drawn from work with Korean children who were referred for psychological evaluation because of learning or behavioral/emotional problems. Initial demographic data was taken describing the children's age, length of time in the U.S., sex, language spoken at home, and reason for referral. Results for intelligence, perceptual-motor, projective, and achievement tests were obtained. On the intelligence test both the Mean Full Scale and Verbal IQ scores were slightly below equal to the American norms. Performance on the perceptual-motor test was also similar to American norms. Tentative conclusions were drawn from the projective test for personality and emotional assessment, which was given to a small number of children who revealed a limited verbal capacity and limited creative resources. On the achievement test children were on the whole three or four years behind in reading, and spelling, and two years behind in arithmetic. Recommendations were made on the basis of these test results and solutions to Korean children's language and acculturation problems were offered. (Author/APM)

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# Psychological Evaluation of Korean School Children: A Preliminary Report

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Psychological Evaluation of Korean School Children:

A Preliminary Report

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on some of the observations made while evaluating Korean school children in the greater Chicago area. The number of Asian children has more than doubled in the past 10 years from 1970 to 1980, largely due to the amendment of the immigration law in 1965 that relaxed the restriction of immigrants from Asiatic countries. A small but steady increase of Japanese children is further noted in recent years, as more Japanese business men bring their family members to this country. The number of refugees from Indochina also dramatically increased after the fall of Vietnam in 1975. Although the proportion of Asian children in the total school population is still small (e.g., the Chicago Public School system has about 9,000 Asian children, or 2 per cent, enrolled in 1980 - 1981 school year), this group presents special and unique needs and problems. Most of these children come here with little proficiency in the English language and from drastically different cultural background. On the other hand, most of the teachers, counselors, social workers, ESL teachers, and adjustment teachers here have had almost no contact with the children from Asian countries, and knew very little about the behavior patterns and socio-cultural backgrounds of these children and their families.

One teacher was puzzled by an Asian child, because he responded with a smile when scolded. Asian children tend to "camouflage" their embarrassment by smiling. Another Asian child was referred for a psychological evaluation because "he does not respond." It never occurred to the teacher that the child might not have understood English. These are a few examples of results due to lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers concerning Asian children. Many concerned professionals in the field of education, however, raised legitimate questions regarding how they could best understand Asian school children. This is the area where a bilingual/bicultural psychologist, who has knowledge of the language and culture of both the children and the teachers, could make a significant contribution. This preliminary report is, therefore, an attempt to provide some valuable information about Asian children to the educators and other professionals who come in contact with Asian children.

The following observations come mostly from our experience working with Korean children who were referred for psychological evaluations because of certain learning or behavioral/emotional problems. Thus, the findings reflect the characteristics of this particular population, and should not be considered as representing all Korean school children in the Chicago area. Furthermore, inter-ethnic variations among different Asian ethnic groups (Asians usually include Chinese, East Indians, Japanese, Koreans, Pilipinos, and Indochinese) are greater than generally understood; accordingly, overgeneralization or stereotyping from the present report should be avoided.

Demographic Data

A total of 52 children out of approximately 3,500 Korean children enrolled during the two school year period from September, 1978 to June, 1980 (1.5 per cent of the total school population) were referred for psychological evaluations. Among those, 34 were boys and 18 were girls (2 to 1 ratio) with the Mean Chronological Age (CA) of 12.50 years (SD=3.87 yrs.). Reasons for Referral were classified into eight categories, with 50 per cent of them (N=26) in the category of "Learning Problems" (slow progress in school, not achieving at expected levels, slow in learning the English language, etc.). "Educational Guidance" (N=9) was the next frequent reason for referral (17 per cent), followed by "Learning Potential" and "Poor Peer Relationship" (10 per cent each). The other categories included: "Speech Problem", "Differential Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities and Foreign Language Interference", "Running Away from Home," and "Emotional problems".

The Mean length of time the children lived in this country, or Sojourn, was 3.16 years (SD=2.30 yrs.), with 71 per cent of them (N=41) came here within the past four years. The Korean language was spoken in the home of all the children evaluated, except for the seven adopted children by American families. Th detailed information is presented below.

| | | N |
|---|---|---|
| Sex: | boys | 34 |
| | girls | 18 |
| CA: | Preschool, ages 4 - 5 | 2 |
| | Elementary, ages 6 - 11 | 19 |
| | Junir High, ages 12 - 14 | 15 |
| | Senior High, ages 15 - 19 | 16 |
| Sojourn: | Less than 1 year | 9 |
| | 1 year | 11 |
| | 2 years | 9 |
| | 3 years | 8 |
| | 4 years | 4 |
| | 5 years | 3 |
| | 6 years | 4 |
| | 7 years | 3 |
| | born here (9 yr. old) | 1 |
| Language spoken at home: | Korean | 45 |
| | English (American parents) | 5 |
| | Mixed (Mixed marriage) | 2 |
| Reason for Referral: | Learning problems | 26 |
| | Educational guidance | 9 |
| | Learning potential | 5 |
| | Poor peer relationship | 5 |
| | Speech problem | 3 |
| | Emotional problems | 2 |
| | Running away from home | 1 |
| | Differential diagnosis between LD and foreign language interference | 1 |

Psychological Test Results

All of the children except for a few exceptions who were unable to perform certain part of the testing, were given a battery of tests including a standardized intelligence test (one of the Wechsler Scales, the Stanford-Binet, the Leiter, McCarthy, etc.), a perceptual-motor test (Bender Motor Gestalt, Beery Developmental Test of Visual Motor Integration), a projective test (Rorschach, Thematic Apperception Test, Children's Apperception Test, Educational Apperception Test, Draw-A-Person Test, House-Tree-Person Technique), and an achievement test (Wide Range Achievement Test). These were administered individually in the child's dominant language, or the language he/she is most proficient. The language proficiency or dominance was determined by a bilingual psychologist through structured oral questions in English and Korean. Twenty-five children (48 per cent) were given the test in Korean, 21 (40 per cent) were given in English. For 6 children, both the English and Korean language were used in the testing session.

A. Intelligence Test: Three major individual intelligence tests were used for assessing the children's intellectual or learning potential. For younger children (6 years or younger), especially when the child's mental development was delayed, the Stanford-Binet test was given. For the children, ages between 6 and 15 the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised, and for those 16 and over, the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale was administered.

Only the WISC-R results were analyzed for the presentation, since the number of children received the WAIS (13 cases) and the S-B (6 cases) was small. The WISC-R was given to 33 children (21 boys and 12 girls). The group data are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Both the Mean Full Scale and Verbal IQ scores were slightly below average than the American norms, with the Mean Performance IQ being equal to the American norms. There was practically no difference between the male and female in the Verbal scores. However, boys scored slightly higher in the Performance tests and Full Scale scores than girls; but these sex differences were not significant.

As Figure 1 shows, these children scored the highest on Picture Arrangement, and the lowest on Information and Vocabulary. The profiles of the girls and the boys were essentially the same, although boys tended to score slightly higher than girls on all the Performance subtests except for Coding. It was surprising to find that these children scored above average on the Picture Arrangement, because some of the pictures or the themes to be sequenced are not familiar in the Korean culture. On the other hand, we did not expect that they would experience more difficulty in identifying missing details in the Picture Completion, because most of the pictures in this test were familiar to Korean children. Some perceptual or cognitive style such as field dependent-independent, might be involved in these children.

Table 1

WISC-R Results

| | | boys(N=21) | girls (N=12) | total (N=33) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CA in months | Mean | 139.10 | 136.92 | 138.30 |
| | SD | 29.04 | 32.18 | 29.74 |
| IQ V | Mean | 89.71 | 89.30 | 89.58 |
| | SD | 14.89 | 18.29 | 15.76 |
| IQ P | Mean | 100.62 | 94.50 | 98.39 |
| | SD | 19.01 | 18.31 | 18.71 |
| IQ F | Mean | 94.19 | 91.90 | 93.45 |
| | SD | 15.13 | 18.88 | 16.15 |

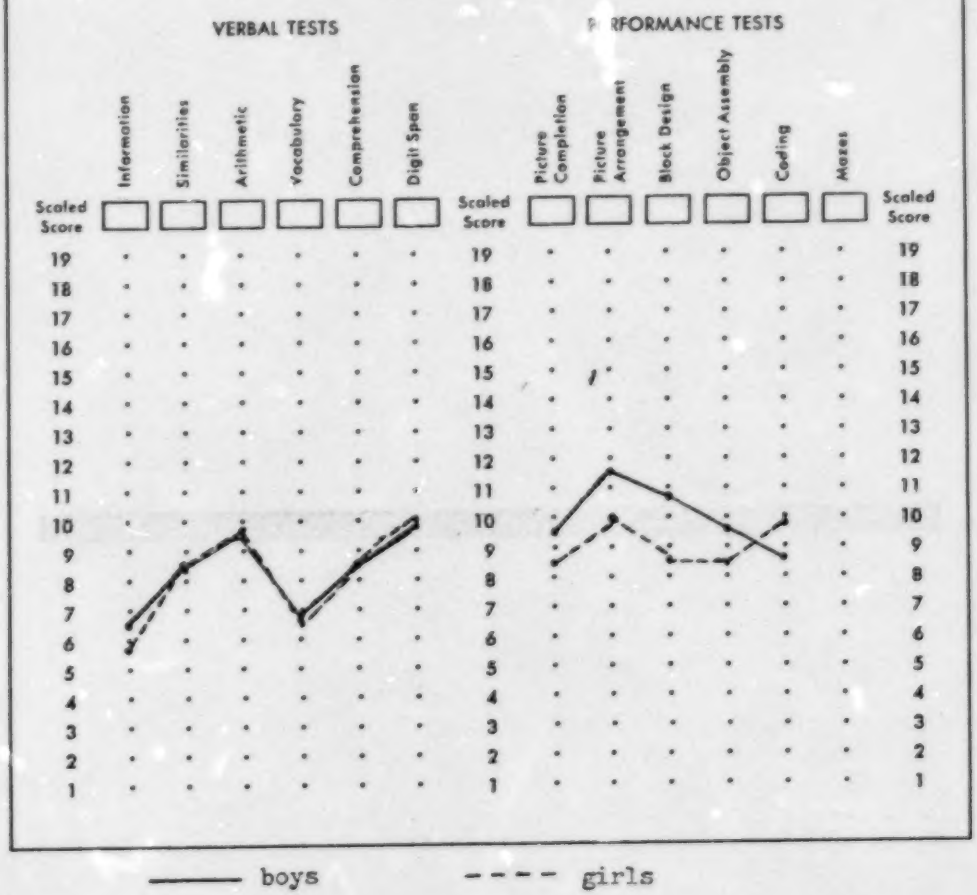
The Mean WISC-R sub-test scaled scores

| Verbal Tests | boys | girls | total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Information | 6.43 (3.01)** | 5.70 (2.91) | 6.19 (2.95) |
| Similarities | 8.29 (2.99) | 8.40 (3.66) | 8.32 (3.16) |
| Arithmetic | 9.43 (2.80) | 9.60 (3.14) | 9.48 (2.95) |
| Vocabulary | 6.94 (3.77) | 6.71 (3.50) | 6.88 (3.62) |
| Comprehension | 8.52 (2.44) | 8.50 (3.69) | 8.52 (2.84) |
| (Digit Span) | 9.83 (3.01) | 10.00 (3.34) | 9.88 (3.66) |
| **Performance Tests** | | | |
| Picture Completion | 9.48 (2.99) | 8.42 (2.78) | 9.09 (2.92) |
| Picture Arrangement | 11.67 (4.15) | 10.00 (4.16) | 11.05 (4.33) |
| Block Design | 10.76 (3.30) | 8.58 (3.58) | 9.97 (3.51) |
| Object Assembly | 9.62 (3.04) | 8.25 (2.63) | 9.12 (2.93) |
| Coding | 8.55 (3.22) | 9.92 (4.32) | 9.06 (3.66) |

** SD in parenthesis

Figure 1

WISC-R PROFILE



B. Perceptual-Motor Test: Most of the children were given either the Bender Motor Gestalt Test or the Beery Developmental Test of Visual Motor Integration. To a very limited number of children who needed more detailed visual-perceptual diagnostic workup, the Frostig Test of Visual Perception was administered.

Their performance on these visual motor tasks were similar to the American norms, as was found in the WISC-R Performance Tests. It was noted that there were tendencies that the children do a better job when they were provided confined space or boxes in which the figures were to be drawn, such in the case of Beery, than when provided with a whole sheet of paper on which to draw. This tendency appears to be consistent with the notion of the "field dependency" noted in the WISC-R Picture Completion test.

C. Projective Test: For personality and emotional assessment, Rorschach Inkblot Test, Thematic Apperception Test (or its variation), Draw-A-Person, House-Tree-Person technique were used.

Any definite conclusions are not warranted at this time due to the small number of protocols for each test. Some tentative observations are made, however.

In general, these children were not as verbal as compared to average American children, even in their native language: and in consequence, the number of responses was much smaller. Their responses tended to be more descriptive of physical scenes and less expressive of feelings or emotions. For example, there were very limited Color, Vista, Texture, or Shading responses in the Rorschach protocols. Fantasy activities or creative resources appeared to be less fertile.

These observations may have been the characteristics of this particular group in this study, however, rather than general characteristics of Korean children. In fact, there were two very imaginative and long protocols obtained from two highly verbal girls. One was diagnosed as schizophrenia and the other was a runaway with sociopathic tendencies.

D. Achievement Test: Among the toal Ss, 43 children were given the Wide Range Achievement Test. The Mean Age of the children was 12.86 year (SD=3.69 yrs.); and the grade equivalents on Reading, Spelling, and Arithmetic were as follows:

| | grade equivalent | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | 3.49 | SD | 2.39 |
| Reading | | | | |
| Spelling | | 3.40 | | 2.42 |
| Arithmetic | | 5.74 | | 3.86 |

Thus, the children as a whole were about 3 - 4 years behind in Reading and Spelling, and 2 years behind in Arithmetic. Although the girls tended to achieve a little higher than the boys, the differences were not significant.

Correlations between the school achievement and some demographic variables (Age, IQ, and Sojourn) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between the WRAT Achievement Scores and the Age, IQ, and Sojourn

| | Reading | Spelling | Arithmetic |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 0.05 | 0.47** | 0.66** |
| IQ | 0.26 | 0.36* | 0.60** |
| Sojourn | 0.51** | 0.41** | 0.15 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

As shown, Reading is most highly correlated with Sojourn; Arithmetic with Age and IQ; and Spelling was correlated with all three variables.

Recommendations Made

On the basis of our evaluation, 35 children (67 per cent) were recommended for extra help in English (either ESL or bilingual program). Individual psychotherapy or counseling was recommended for 9 cases (17 per cent), followed by 3 (6 per cent) Learning Disabilities, 2 (4 per cent) Educably Mentally Handicapped, and one (2 per cent) Non-Categorical Preschool program Parent counseling by bilingual/bicultural psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker was recommended for 90 per cent of the parents of these children.

Discussion

About one half of the Korean children who were referred for a psychological evaluation had average or near average learning potential, and they were just needing of some more time to learn the English language. About one half of all referred, however, had "real" problems that were not solely attributable to learning a second language, and resulted in special classroom placement or referred for individual psychotherapy or counseling.

Teachers reported that, even with those children who did not have any other problems except the language handicap, the bilingual psychological evaluation was useful in planning their future educational programs. This group of children also gave the teachers some general expectation levels as to what can be expected of a child from Asia, that has different linguistic/cultural background. For example, compared to bilingual children from European countries, Asian children require a longer period of acculturation in terms of language and culture. It takes 2 - 3 years for Asian children compared to 6 months to a year for European immigrant children.

From this study, we were able to form some tentative hypotheses that can be emprically tested. The tendency of "field dependent" perceptual or cognitive style found in this group, for example, could be tested with so-called "normal" Korean children. If the normal group does not show this tendency, the low score on WISC-R Picture Completion or "field-dependent" cognitive style may be used for screening in identifying "high risk" children in the general Korean school population.

We are continuing with item analysis with the present data to identify those items with which the Korean children had particular difficulty. From our preliminary analysis, the lower scores were found in the following items. Information: Nickle, Bacon, Dozen, America, 1776, Border, Ton, Los Angeles; Similarities: Beer-Wine, Pound-Yard; Comprehension: Policemen, Inspect Meat, Charity, Secret Ballot, Paperbacks, Senators.

We feel that these items contain an object, concept or experience that is not familiar to Korean children. It follows, then, that this is not a special problem pertaining only to this particular group, but may be applicable to general population of Korean children.